



PM art: Robert Handville

The Best Old Guns Are New

Good replica guns and modern muzzleloaders are not cheap. But compared with collector originals, they are bargains indeed. What's more, replicas do a better job of demonstrating how the originals handled, and for that matter, how they shot, than the classics could do themselves today.

How can that be? Easy. Most of the original Revolutionary arms are in museums or private collections and are too valuable to risk firing. Those in good shape are too good to play with, and the bad ones are either nonworking, unsafe, or both. A good modern replica, however, feels like an original, fires like an original, and can give the real sensation of what old-time shooting was like.

An original Whitworth military target rifle, for example, of the type used by some Confederate snipers and English target shooters, might cost \$2,000

Fully operational replicas of antique firearms have become elegant collectables.

BY ANGUS LAIDLAW

to \$4,000 in good condition today. The Navy Arms replica of the Whitworth lists for \$575 and is gauged by the same gauges that were used to inspect the originals in the 1860s. The new barrels have the identical hexagonal rifling making one turn in 20 inches that enabled the original Whitworths to hit a 30-inch target at up to 1,000 yards. The replicas not only look the same, they shoot as well or better using modern cast lead bullets. Matches for these and other slug guns—so-called because they shoot a conical bullet or slug rather than the round ball of

many other muzzleloading rifles—are featured in numerous black powder matches.

Since 1954, when the first mass-produced muzzleloading rifle and pistol replicas were introduced, more copies of some models like the Walker Colts, have been made than were ever turned out originally. Two developments during the last 25 years have given the black powder sports a major push. Military and civilian organizations and clubs have been formed to duplicate those of a century or so ago, right down to the same uniforms and equipment. And then there have been new laws that make primitive muzzleloader hunting seasons legal in most states.

Military units commemorating the Indian Wars, the Revolution and the Civil War have created a demand for exact replicas of original uniforms, equipment, personal arms and even



Dixie Gun Works modern muzzleloader (left) is Tennessee flintlock squirrel rifle. Customized Kentucky flint long rifle, by George Heinemann, replicates 1790 styling. Whitworth hexagonal-bore sniper rifle (center), from Navy Arms, has 1,000-yard range. Percussion Hawken II, by Navy Arms, is suitable field rifle for deer hunting. Navy Magnum 12-gauge shotgun (right) is a black powder choice for clay pigeons and waterfowl. Flintlock pistol copies specifications from Williamsburg for British Army 1761 Dragoon.

PM photos: George Ancona,
at Museum Village, Monroe, N.Y.



Cased dueling pistols would cost thousands for the 1870 originals. But shooters can now get Navy Arms copy set for \$700.

artillery. To meet the requirements of the Brigade of the American Revolution, for example, no nonperiod items are allowed. No digital watches, cigarette lighters, or zippers, and the barrel on your Brown Bess musket replica must be the correct 42 inches long, with all other features of the arm line-for-line correct when compared with an original. The result now is a quality assortment of authentic modern reproductions of historic muskets, rifles, fowling pieces and pistols. Inaccurate, poorly made copies have no market.

Hunters have also done much to foster the availability of good quality and

A 1750 Tinderlighter could strike light for attached candle. Navy Arms: \$69.95.



reasonably priced replicas. Ten years ago, few states had special seasons for muzzleloaders. Now, nearly all do. Many of the sportsmen attracted by these extra seasons were hunters first and black powder shooters a distant second. While they cared greatly about legal hunting, they gave less than a hoot about historic accuracy. What they wanted was a dependable modern muzzleloader.

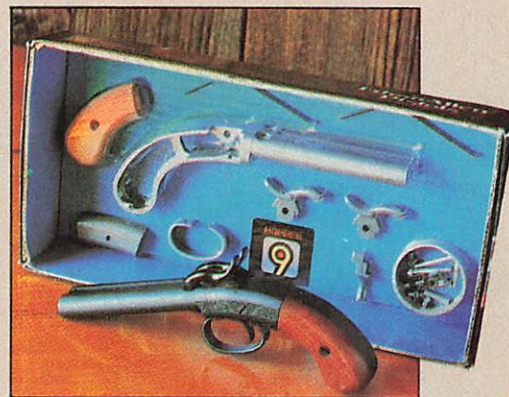
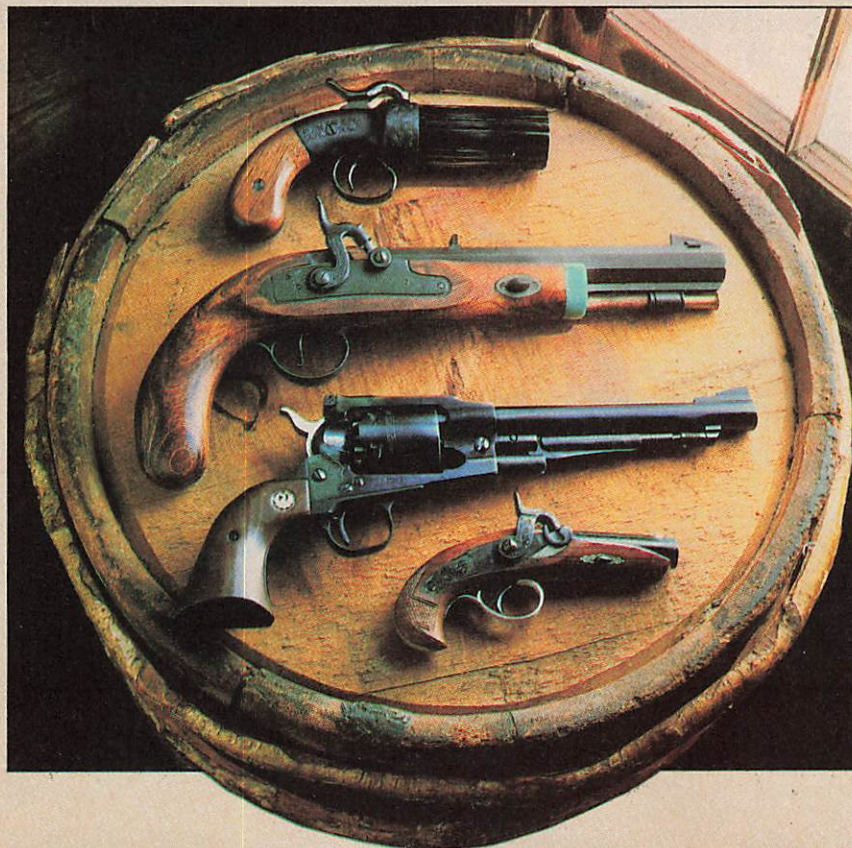
From this demand came the Thompson Center Renegade, based on their earlier and more historically correct Hawken. The Renegade has a modern shotgun-style butt plate with no horns to poke you on recoil. It has adjustable sights so that a hunter can develop a load and then zero in his sights without files and a hammer. Introduced



Favorite old hideaways for pistols were imitation books. Navy Arms cases this 1862 New Police Colt with accessories.

just this year, the Renegade Cougar has stainless fittings and lock parts to make it more durable and to look more like modern stainless models. The wood is quality American walnut, and the result is a handsome piece that the old-time mountain men would have found a bit strange, but very desirable.

Besides being used for hunting and
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Double barrel percussion Ethan Allen pocket pistol from Hoppe's comes as parts kit or finished for under \$100.

Ethan Allen model (top left) is pepperbox. Mountain Pistol is by Connecticut Valley Arms. Ruger Old Army revolver is available in stainless steel. Lincoln derringer (bottom) is by Navy Arms. Most come factory-finished or as kits.



ONLY THE STRONG

It takes guts, stamina and desire to compete in a 24-hour race. The PM team had enough of all three to win!

BY GARY WITZENBURG
DETROIT AUTO EDITOR

It starts with two parade laps. Forty colorful cars guided by 40 nervous drivers snake two-by-two around the twisty, two-mile Nelson Ledges road course. The second time by, the tension thickens like summer heat as the drivers narrow their collective concentration toward the starter with his green flag.

The cars edge closer and closer to the starting line.

The pole-sitting Chevrolet Camaro and our second-qualifying Porsche 944 purposely hold down their speed during the pace lap to keep the turbocars behind us off their turbocharger boost, thereby limiting their power. But racers being racers, even in endurance

contests, everybody wants to be first into the first turn and lead the first lap.

Forty throttle feet hit the floorboards simultaneously as the green flag flies. Forty engines moan as they build power. Forty drivers grip the wheel tighter.

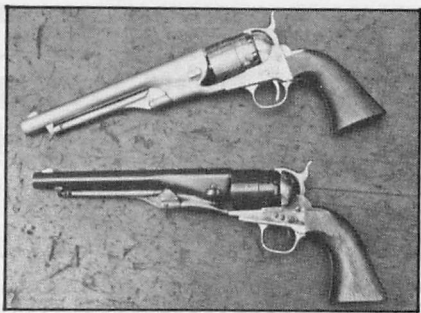
As expected, the Camaro wins the drag race to the first turn. But, oh no! Freddy in our Porsche is trying to pass him on the outside. Side by side down the short straight, toward the first turn, and side by side into it. Two expert drivers in two bright red cars, inches apart on a track still wet from an early rain, taking the measure of each other. And giving no quarter. One red car

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reenacting battles from past wars, modern replica arms have rejuvenated a whole field of target and sport shooting. A few old-timers were still shooting originals in competition. But without the inexpensive replicas, there's no way the black powder sport could have achieved its present popularity.

Some stainless-steel muzzleloader



Thompson Center Cougar Hawken (top) and reissued Colt 1860 Army are in stainless steel. There are also blued versions.



Colt's reissued 1860 Army .44 (\$485) is of stainless steel. Connecticut Valley Arms' made-in-Italy replica is \$158.



Four percussion revolver replicas from CVA are (left to right) 1861 Colt Navy (in box), 1860 Colt Army, 1851 brass-frame Navy and 1858 Remington .44.

revolvers and rifles have been built to modern designs and are intended specifically for competition. Others may become instant collectables. The reissued Colt 1860 Army revolver in blued steel and more expensive stainless only will be in production for a short period. Those who shoot it and care for it well may expect considerable appreciation. And anyone who puts it away new for five years might double the \$484.50 cost. A quarter century from now, these

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few stainless models could be worth more than their original predecessors which fought the Civil War on both sides and helped open the West.

Demands by the buckskinners and others for accurate replicas like the Tennessee Mountain Squirrel Rifle in .32 caliber (Dixie Gun Works) have caused many of these to be mass produced. Both flintlock and percussion cap versions of these are available with extra locks and fittings so that one rifle can be converted to either ignition system. The base price of \$295 for the percussion model is a bargain for an accu-



Ronald Plourde's Company of 4th Battalion Royal Artillery fire 3-pounder with South Bend tube, Ashe carriage.

rately styled, straight-shooting long rifle.

Both factory-made and handcrafted Kentucky long rifles are popular. The one shown here is a handmade example by New Jersey hobbyist George Heinemann. Accurately styled modern rifles like this one, made with highest quality locks (L&R), barrels (Bob Paris) and fancy maple stock blanks, can cost upward of \$5,000 when created by top-ranking modern muzzleloader gunsmiths like J.S. Brooks or William Buechelle. While this kind of expense can exceed the cost of an original, the buyer gets a safe rifle with a perfect bore capable of fine hunting or competition accuracy. He also gets a gun fitted to him so that it handles as no mass-produced arm ever will.

Besides historical and working replicas, less well-known but interesting arms of the 19th century are being replicated. Finely crafted dueling pistols in both flint and percussion (Navy Arms, Dixie Gun Works and others) can double as target shooters for handgun enthusiasts. Prices range from about \$250 per pistol to \$700 for the matched set of LePage duelers with French-style case, brass oiler, powder flask, nipple wrench, turnscrew (the formal term for a screwdriver as pretty as this one) and loading rod with rifling protector.

On a more affordable level, Penguin Industries, makers of Hoppe's No. 9

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nitro powder and black powder solvents, have introduced three copies of the early Ethan Allen pistols produced in New England in the 1840s. The pepperbox, so-called because its six rotating barrels looked something like a pepper mill, was one of the early muzzleloading repeaters. It was cheaper than Colt's revolvers at the time, and may also have gotten its name from its tendency to fire all six barrels at once and pepper anything in its path. A simple side-by-side double pistol and a single-shot target model are also in the Ethan Allen line, selling for less than \$100 in home assembly kits or available prefinished.

Time was when a percussion double shotgun cost less than \$10 and you could find a good one in almost any antique shop. Those days are gone, but Italian-made replicas, like the 12 Gauge Magnum Percussion Shotgun (Navy Arms) now lists for about \$325. That's not expensive, however, when compared to the prices of many modern doubles. What's more, muzzleloader shotguns shoot just as hard as modern breechloaders, and the second barrel of a double can be fired almost as quickly.

Cannon replicas, too

Cannon shooters have also gone the replica route. But they can rarely afford to go it alone. This may be a good thing, since it takes teamwork and correct procedures to shoot these monsters safely. These reconstituted artillery organizations have special cannon shooting matches and engage in parades and battle re-enactments.

In the past few years, an International Muzzleloading Shooting Program has developed for firing everything from 16th-century Japanese matchlocks—a short length of clothesline ignites the charge—to modern replica percussion revolvers. Information about courses of fire and qualifying dates for future matches is available from Robert Reiber, USIMLC Tryout Chairman, 1505 Spruce Ridge Way, Stone Mountain, Ga. 30083.

Those interested in modern black powder shooting can join the National Muzzleloading Rifle Assn., Box 67, Friendship, Ind. 47021. Dues are \$14 per year and include a subscription to *Muzzle Blasts*, their monthly magazine. In it are articles about the sport, lists of the many matches held around the country, and advertising for the originals, replicas and accessories that contribute to the appeal of the sport.

If the black powder sport is booming, and it is, it's because they don't build 'em like they used to. They build 'em better.

PM